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# Literature of the Scientific Imagination. [Review of Daniel Fondanèche's *La Littérature d'imagination scientifique*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012]

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*La Littérature d'imagination scientifique*. Par DANIEL FONDANÈCHE. (Faux titre, 385.) Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012. 398 pp.

Daniel Fondanèche's monograph was one of three new and important scholarly studies on the history of science fiction to appear in French in 2012, the other two being Natacha Vas-Deyres's *Ces Français qui ont écrit demain: utopie, anticipation et science-fiction au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Champion) and Simon Bréan's *La Science-Fiction en France: théorie et histoire d'une littérature* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne). Together, they constitute a notable turning point in the treatment and recent legitimization of science fiction in the French academy, but all three differ considerably in their historical scope, methodology, and style. Vas-Deyres covers the period from the 1890s to 2004 and focuses exclusively on speculative works that portray how society will be in the future; her approach is socio-political and ideological, and her prose is both richly documented and heavy with jargon. Bréan analyses what he calls the 'birth' of French science fiction during the decades after the Second World War; his method is literary and semiotic, and his style, while generally readable, often includes challenging doses of narrative theory. Fondanèche, by contrast, focuses on what some critics have called the genre's 'prehistory', from the ancient Greek Lucian of Samosata to the French author J.-H. Rosny *ainé*; his analytical perspective is techno-historical, and his writing style is easily accessible for the non-specialist. Fondanèche's book follows in the footsteps of Jean-Jacques Bridenne's short but seminal *La Littérature française d'imagination scientifique* (1950). Like Bridenne, he traces the emergence and evolution of this 'literature of scientific imagination', which he views as a kind of techno-romance genre that preceded and prepared the way for the emergence of 'science fiction' in the early twentieth century. Fondanèche examines selected works from a wide variety of 'proto-SF' authors such as Cyrano de Bergerac, Louis-Sébastien Mercier, Émile Souvestre, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Louis Boussenard, Georges Le Faure and Henri de Graffigny, Camille Flammarion, Paul d'Ivoi, H. G. Wells, and Charles Cros. After providing a brief synopsis of the work's plot, he then discusses the scientific and technological references embedded in it, offering detailed historical information about these references and linking them to other authors and works in the genre. Many of Fondanèche's readings are interesting and informative, and his scientific knowledge often seems impressively encyclopedic. But, to my mind, there are some fundamental weaknesses in the design, content, and overall value of this book. The dominant focus on the stories' technological references makes it less a history of literature than a history of applied science in literature. The chapter headings suggest a chronologically linear crescendo beginning with 'Les Précurseurs', followed by 'L'Émergence', and culminating with 'Les Maîtres du genre'. But many of the works by authors included in the 'emergence' section (for example, Flammarion, d'Ivoi, Cros) were actually published many years *after* certain 'masters of the genre' (such as Verne) had *already* popularized the genre internationally. And the quality of Fondanèche's analyses — as, for example, in his treatment of Verne — are surprisingly uneven. Finally, at more than €80, I find the book to be unreasonably priced for a paperback.

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*La Révélation inachevée: le personnage à l'épreuve de la vérité romanesque*. Par YANNICK ROY. Paris: Éditions L'Âge d'Homme, 2012. 282 pp.

Yannick Roy's ambitious essay is an exploration of the role of fictional characters and of the ways in which authors and readers relate to them. He describes this relation as inherently paradoxical since it requires the reader's and the author's identification with, and detachment from, the characters. Following Milan Kundera, Roy views the novel as